

## THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, CYCLE A

**Open with a prayer:** *Jesus, you are the Living Water that brings us here today. Thank you for pouring the living waters of faith, new life and love into us at baptism. Bless us as we journey together during this Lenten Season. May Easter find us washed of sin and more ready to embrace your ways. Amen.*

**Sharing of life:** What are you most and least grateful for this week?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** During the next three Sundays of Lent, we will read and reflect on three powerful Gospels which tell us about Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman, a blind man and a dead man. All three Gospels speak to us of *baptismal themes*: living water, healing of blindness (enlightenment) and Jesus' power over sin and death. The three Gospels proclaim God's power to quench our deepest thirst (this Sunday), his power to heal our spiritual blindness (next Sunday) and his power to raise us from whatever tomb of death we may find ourselves in (the fifth Sunday). From the earliest days of Christianity, these three texts were used as sources of instruction for the *elect* who were preparing for baptism at Easter. In our Church, these three texts are used for the *Three Scrutiny Rites*, which our elect will experience on the next three Sundays as they prepare for their entrance into our Catholic community at Easter. The purpose of the scrutiny ritual is to uncover, and then heal all that is weak, defective and sinful in the lives of the elect: to call out, and strengthen all that is upright, strong and good. As we pray for the elect, we ask God to do exactly the same for us. This week's focus is the faith and trust that leads us to Jesus, the Living Water.

*If you have not read the commentary on the three readings prior to your meeting, consider reading it either before or after you read each reading.*

### FIRST READING: Exodus 17:3-7

The grumbling, mistrust and lack of gratitude shown by the Israelites as they journey through the desert is the very opposite of the attitudes of faith and trust needed in those who seek Living Water. In the face of their grumbling, Moses, the great intercessor and mediator lifts up his hands in prayer. In contrast to the people's mistrust in God, Moses places his trust in his power to save his people – even his rebellious people. When “the going gets tough”, when resources are running low, we are called more than ever to place our trust in God. The water pouring from the Rock shows God's care for his people. The water also prefigures the living waters of baptism.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 95

This well-known psalm invites us to open our hearts to the Lord and to sing joyfully to him – something the Israelites in the desert failed to do and something the Samaritan woman did very beautifully.

### SECOND READING: Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

This reading opens up by speaking of the “faith that justifies”, the gift of faith that makes us acceptable to God. The reading also reminds us that through the Holy Spirit “*the love of God has been poured into our hearts*”. Our gospel story will give us a concrete example of the love of God being poured into the heart of a nameless woman. Finally, Paul reminds us that God is so gracious that he was willing to die for us *even* while we were still sinners.

### GOSPEL: John 4:4-42

This is a beautiful story of a woman coming to faith in Jesus, the Living Water and leading others to place their trust in him.

The story opens with a beautiful image of the *human Jesus*. He is tired and thirsty. By speaking to a *Samaritan woman* in public, Jesus was violating some cultural taboos: Jews didn't speak to Samaritans and Jewish men didn't speak to strange women in public. So, by speaking to this woman, Jesus was attacking centuries of prejudice toward *women* and *Samaritans*.

As the story unfolds and as the woman opens up to Jesus, he *gradually* reveals his true nature to her. Initially, she calls him, “Sir” then “prophet” and finally, “Messiah”. Jesus reveals himself as the “living water” that she was *unconsciously* searching for in her relationship with her five husbands.

In verses 21-24, there is a discussion about true worship. Jesus tells us that worship is not made authentic by the *place* where one worships (Jerusalem or Gerizim) but by the *Spirit* and *truth* in which one prays.

In verses 27-38, Jesus has a dialog with his disciples who are very surprised, if not scandalized to see him talking to a Samaritan woman. “But no one asked him “. . . *why are you talking to her?*” they ask. Then they offer him food. Jesus responds by telling them that his “*food is to do the will of him who sent me*” (v.34). Doing the will of his Father was the central consuming passion of Jesus’ life. Then he urges them to pray that more workers be raised up to reap a harvest ready to be harvested – probably a reference to the Gentiles hungry for Good News.

In the meantime, the woman filled with the Living Water races back to her village to share her Good News. “*Come and see a man who told me everything I have done. Could this be the Christ?*” The rejected and scorned woman becomes a messenger of God’s love. The people invite Jesus to stay in their village. After a “retreat with Jesus” they say to the woman: “We no longer believe because of *your* word; for we have *heard for ourselves*, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.” A favorite theme of John is that Jesus is known by “a personally experienced faith contact” and not just by hearsay.

Finally, this story brings alive many of the promises and verses of the Old Testament. For example: “*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*” (Is 12:3). “*All you who are thirsty come to the water... Come without paying, without cost, drink.*” (Is 55:1).

## **FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. What verse spoke to you most and why?
2. Today’s first reading ends with the questions: “*Is the Lord in our midst or not?*” If someone asked you, how would you answer? What evidence can you give to suggest the presence of God in our world and in your life?
3. What do people thirst for today? What do you thirst for?
4. How is Jesus Living Water for you? How can you be Living Water for others?

## **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today’s readings. Suggestion: Pray for an opportunity to share your faith this week. Reflect on the fountain of Living Water within you. Is it bubbling with life or has it become a dry well?

## **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

Pray for the *Elect* who will be baptized this Easter. Pray for all thirsting for Christ and love. Pray for the **Gift of Water** ministry that seeks to provide clean water to the people of Haiti and Jamaica. For more information visit their web page: [www.giftofwater.org](http://www.giftofwater.org). ©

## **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Blessed are you, God of all life, we praise you for the water of life you offer us. Scrutinize us, heal us, and strengthen us along with the elect. We make our prayer through your Son, Jesus Christ our lord. Amen.*